

## **What would Tunku Abdul Rahman do in light of raging racial tensions?**

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**BY EILEEN NG**

Had Tunku Abdul Rahman been still around, he would have been disappointed with the elements that are trying to divide Malaysia and its people.

The nation's first prime minister had considered himself to be the happiest premier in the world, but had he been alive today, he would be Malaysia's saddest man due to the raging racial religious tensions.

With his legacy of unity being threatened, speakers at a forum held to commemorate Tunku's 111th birthday last night in Kajang said there is a need to secure his legacy to ensure the nation remains united.

DAP adviser Lim Kit Siang said Tunku wanted peace, love and harmony, which he lamented seemed to be in short supply in recent months.

"Never before has Malaysia been so divided and polarised, with the last eight to nine months being the worst. Today's forum is for us to think of what we have lost in our 56 years of nation building.

"Tunku would want to see a united country. Is Malaysia more united or divided now? Has the issue of race and religion become more polarising?" he said at the forum in last night.

The veteran politician noted that during Tunku's time, there was certain civic and gentle chivalry that seemed to have gone down the gutters today.

Described as a prime minister for all Malaysians, Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan said her father and his colleagues were among the ones who were inspired by the Kedah prince turned premier to work together to develop the nation.

"At that time, the spirit of nationalism was reigning high but what inspired people to work for the country was Tunku – he made everyone feel they belonged and that was crucial to build and develop the country," she said.

If Tunku was alive today, what would he say to the way Malaysia is today?

"I would think he would say the same thing... that unity is our fundamental strength. He would be disappointed at attempts to divide us. He hated racism, as shown by his vocal views against apartheid," she said.

Anwar tells of his encounter with the late former prime minister at the forum, saying that he was widely described as a gentleman. – The Malaysian Insider pic by Nazir Sufari, February 11, 2014. Anwar tells of his encounter with the late former prime minister at the forum, saying that he was widely described as a gentleman. – The Malaysian Insider pic by Nazir Sufari, February 11, 2014. Opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said during Tunku's time, the former premier, widely described as a gentleman, was accepting of criticism even against his leadership to ensure the country continue to grow.

In sharing a personal anecdote of Tunku in his twilight years, the former deputy prime minister said he hosted a dinner which was attended by the statesman.

"He was telling the attendees 'you know this young man? He was a great fighter but he became tired. So he joined Umno'. I just bowed my head and didn't say anything," he said.

Anwar, who was sacked from his post and party after falling out with former long-serving prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1998, reminded Malaysians to adhere and return to the spirit of the Federal Constitution.

"We must have tenacity of purpose to defend the spirit of the Constitution. We will be stronger if we remember and adhere to some of Tunku's principles which many had forgotten," he said.

He also took to task those who condoned the actions of groups who threaten assault against DAP Seputeh MP Teresa Kok over her Chinese New Year YouTube.

A group of Islamic NGOs had slaughtered two chickens and offered a RM1,200 to anyone who slapped Kok over her video which allegedly insulted Malays.

"You have every right to question Teresa, but you have no right to insult the intelligence of Malaysians and giving the go ahead for everyone to be threatened with slaps. This is crazy," he said.

PAS's election director Dr Hatta Ramli said despite his Islamist party and Tunku being political rivals, they had always respected the former prime minister for being down to earth and non-confrontational.

He said during Tunku's governance from the mid-1950s until 1970, there was no such thing as Malay supremacy.

Rivalry aside, Hatta said he and he party always respected Tunku for being down to earth. – The Malaysian Insider pic by Nazir Sufari, February 11, 2014. Rivalry aside, Hatta said he and he party always respected Tunku for being down to earth. – The Malaysian Insider pic by Nazir Sufari, February 11, 2014. "If we ask Tunku whether he is a Malaysian or Malay first, he would have said the former," Dr Hatta said.

Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim regaled the audience with a series of anecdotes about Tunku, whom he had heard much about from the former prime minister's peers, especially former Bank Negara governor Tun Ismail Mohamed Ali.

In calling Tunku a "real gentleman with integrity", Khalid said Tunku was instrumental in starting the Merdeka tournament football competition and the Islamic Development Bank. He also mooted the regional political and economic grouping Asean.

For Khalid, nothing beats seeing Tunku's race horse winning the Melbourne Cup. – The Malaysian Insider pic by Nazir Sufari, February 11, 2014. For Khalid, nothing beats seeing Tunku's race horse winning the Melbourne Cup. – The Malaysian Insider pic by Nazir Sufari, February 11, 2014. In sharing a personal experience, Khalid said when he was a student in Australia, he went to a Melbourne Cup horse race and was surprised to see a man with a songkok with the winning horse.

"I realised that was my prime minister. His horse won the Melbourne Cup," he said. – February 11, 2014.

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